

Travel Guide for KTD Pilgrimage

(By Kate Hawthorne, et al. Last revised 6.4.25)

Karma Triyana Dharmachakra is our “home” monastery in the Catskill Mountains of New York. Making a pilgrimage there is both a blessing and an overall enjoyable experience that presents opportunities for personal growth and exploration.

However, the distance and travel aspect can seem a bit daunting. This guide is meant to provide information on travel and helpful tips that may alleviate some travel stress. ☺

Multiple Options for Travel:

- ☀ You can travel by **Air to Albany airport (ALB)** which is the quickest option, and you can **Uber/Taxi** to and from the airport to KTD. Not having a car might be difficult for some, but the good news is that since KTD provides all meals and there are lots of opportunities for activities, there are plenty of reasons to stay ‘On Campus’ the whole retreat. So not having a car is not something you will likely miss. If the event you are attending requires you to stay ‘Off Campus’ (due to its popularity and there being no rooms left at KTD) you may want to have a car so you can have more freedom to come and go, so traveling by air may not be the best option in this instance.
- ☀ You can also go by **Train**. You can take a bus from Columbus to Cleveland, or have someone drop you off by car, and then take Amtrak’s Lakeshore Limited train from Cleveland (CLE) to the nearest stop to KTD, which is in Rhinecliff (RHI), New York. From there you can uber/taxi to KTD or have someone pick you up. Amtrak Coach class fares are much cheaper than the air options, but if you want a private compartment (with all meals included) it can be pricier. The upside is you can use the time on the train (about 11 hours) to work on anything you’d like, or even sleep; the downside is that it’s 11 hours ☺.
- ☀ Then there is **Driving**, which tends to be a popular choice among our KTC dharma friends. So, most of the rest of this guide will be catered towards this option. With driving you have the freedom of leaving anytime you want and tons of flexibility in terms of when you stop. It is also generally cheaper as you only

need to worry about paying for gas. The downside is it is the longest option here – 10 to 12 hours, depending on how often you stop - though there are ways to make the length not feel as long. Another driving possibility to consider is stopping halfway to spend a night somewhere rather than making the journey all in one day. Whatever method you choose, the long drive will be a real bonding experience for you and your fellow travelers – a byproduct of the Columbus-to-Woodstock trek Columbus KTC folks have been making since the late 1970s!

Driving

Cost:

Total roundtrip cost (per person) to and from KTD at the time of this writing including both gas and meals (since you will be on the road for essentially a day) is roughly \$200. You can possibly cut this in half by packing your own meals and bringing snacks. Costs are also dependent on where you stop.

Suggestions:

Some of these suggestions are generally good for any road trip. The pack list is also mostly good for any trip but with some dharma specifics.

☀ **Bring a cushion.** This is both for the car and for KTD. In the car, since you'll be sitting for 10+ hours, you'll want something that won't compress the nerves in your legs or your spine. This prevents the drive from making you extra sore. Also, at KTD if you plan on sitting in a chair – their folding chairs are metal. Bringing a cushion with you to sit on for a long teaching might mitigate some suffering. As an extra consideration you could also bring a small back pillow.

Here's a cushion option: [Amazon Cushion Option](#)

- ☀ On that note, also remember to **stop frequently** while driving to prevent blood clots. Seasoned travelers recommend not exceeding 2 ½ hours of driving at a time if you can help it, both for your sanity and your legs ☺. Even if you only stop to use the bathroom it's good to get out once in a while.
- ☀ **Stay hydrated**, it's easy to not want to drink because you don't want to stop that often. But KTD is located at 1,800 feet above sea level and Central Ohio is at 800 feet above sea level, so the hydration will help you adjust to the altitude change and prevent leg cramps during the ride.
- ☀ **Consider a seat belt adjuster** especially if you are shorter. Some folks find that seat belts cut them across the neck and can be uncomfortable. The adjuster can make the long drive more comfortable.
Seat Belt adjuster example: [Seat Belt Adjuster](#)
- ☀ If you're the driver, get a **hands-free cellphone holder** for your air vent. This way anything related to your cellphone – GPS, listening to audio books, getting a call from someone checking on you – all becomes safer and easy to see because it's right next to your steering wheel. It's also important because many states (including OH and NY) require that all cellphone use be hands-free.
Here's an example of a good holder: [Cellphone Holder](#)
- ☀ Keep your **cell phone plugged in and charging and keep GPS going in the background**. GPS can drain a lot of battery so keep your cell phone constantly plugged in so there's no chance it might go out in the middle of your trip. It's a good idea to keep your Google Maps, Apple Maps, or other GPS going in the background because it will notify you if there are lane shifts, construction, or even police ahead.
- ☀ **Plan things to listen to ahead of time**, even if you're going with someone. It's a very long drive and there might be times no one feels like talking, so plan something to listen to. You can do audio books, CDs, podcasts, or make a YouTube playlist. It's better to pick ahead of time so you don't have to spend any time looking. There are also audiobooks on YouTube as well as KTC's Sunday Dharma Talks.

☀ **Only navigate to your next stop rather than all the way to KTD.** One of our travel advice team says they enter in KTD's address (335 Meads Mountain Road, Woodstock, NY) to determine initial timing and travel distances and then choose one of three popular routes to get to the monastery. Our travel advisors are split on the "best" route to take. Some recommend the middle route (Via I-76 in Ohio and I-80 in Pennsylvania that includes tolls). Our advisor who likes this route says she is happy to pay \$12 in tolls (which are mailed to you at a later date by the highway authority) to avoid a few extra hours of travel. The middle route is also mostly one long road (the I-80 section through PA is VERY long!), so it takes fewer turns and less navigating skill. Once you plug in KTD's address to get directions, there's an option on many map apps to 'add a stop'. You can use this feature to search for gas stations, food, or rest stops. Then once you find one that is the amount of time you'd like to travel (for example, 2 hours) then you can back out and only navigate to that location. This way, rather than being 9 hours away or 7 hours away etc., you are only 2 hours away. By mentally breaking up the journey, it doesn't feel like it's nearly as long as it is and you can *just focus on your next stop rather than the whole journey*. Sounds like dharma practice, right?

☀ As for **where to stop** – you can stop anywhere you want to or prefer. Our travel advisers personally recommend Sheetz gas stations because they are open 24 hours, generally have clean bathrooms, are well lit, and have food you can order ahead. This is especially good if you're driving during hours where nothing else is open. There is also a "Goasis" gas station in Ashland, OH that is a nice pitstop that is open 24 hours. Another good stop is the "AppleGreen" on the NY Thruway (tollroad) in New York. And closer to KTD is the "QuickChek" (next to MoonBurger) at Exit 19 on the NY Thruway, which is another great place to stop on your way.

☀ **KTD's doors lock at 9 pm.** This means that you must arrive there before 9pm unless you've arranged with someone who is already there to let you in. It's best to assume your drive will take at least 11 hours (it's around a solid 9 ½ hours just for driving but when adding in stops, depending on how long you stop and if there

are any delays it could push it out further.) If you stop a lot or have full meals or are leisurely on your drive, it might even take you 13 hours. So try to plan your leave time around getting there before 9pm and hopefully even with a buffer of a couple hours.

- ☀ Our travel advisors therefore recommend **leaving early in the morning**, around 4am or thereabouts. This helps you miss a lot of commuter traffic in Columbus and Akron. If you can get to I-80 before any of the major rush hour times of day it makes things smoother. Also, it's a trick of the mind, but morning time often feels like it doesn't count. So if you can do most of your driving in the morning it won't feel like as much of the day was spent driving.
- ☀ Another huge recommendation is related to going from the Ohio Valley to up in the mountains in upstate New York. As mentioned earlier, this will be a big increase in elevation and this affects the body. Getting up early to travel to KTD is a good idea so that you can have more time to rest. **The first day you need to rest, hydrate, and drink electrolytes**. Overall, just be easy on yourself. You're going to be sore and adjusting after the long drive, but taking these precautions will help you navigate the changes.

Pack List

Your Phone + Your Wallet or Purse

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toothbrush/paste • Face scrub/wipes • Shampoo/Conditioner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body soap • Any person hygiene options like razors, makeup, etc • Feminine Hygiene products if needed • A bag or just a garbage bag to keep dirty laundry separate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deodorant • Hairbrush + Tie • Your medication or supplements x however many days • Optional medications like allergy pills, advil, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacket/sweater • Socks/slippers for walking around the temple • Clothing/undergarments x however many nights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pajamas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snacks • Water • Blanket • Cushion/back pillow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunblock • Lotion • Charging Cord for phone or devices • Shoes depending on season • Electrolytes • Extra Trash bag for trash <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umbrella • Sleep mask, earplugs • KN95 mask/mask 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khata* x 2 • Red Envelopes • Money donation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mala • Instruments if you are doing a practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel Altar • Notebook • Pencil/pens • A book to read in downtime • Travel Cart • Optional: anti-bed bug linens for an off-campus stay
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Here is the full pack list including all possible options. We will explain some of the suggestions above for clarity.

- ☀ **Bed bug detectors:** This is if you are staying off campus. This shouldn't be as much of an issue anymore but if you are staying at an unfamiliar B&B, our travel advisers like to put one of these under the mattress for peace of mind. It can show you quickly if there is anything to be concerned about, but this isn't needed if you are staying at KTD.
- ☀ **Travel cart:** KTD does have a few carts at their entrance that can be used to move luggage to your room; however it's also not a bad thing to buy one for

yourself as it can be useful for lots of outings or festivals. There are many flexible collapsable ones online. KTD's residence wing also has an elevator for using the cart and for folks with mobility issues.

- ☀ **Water:** The cafeteria at KTD is always open so at any time of day you can get water or make tea so there's no need to bring these along but as some of our travel advisers have hydration issues that can get worse in the mountains, so they bring a pack of water with them to make sure they stay hydrated.
- ☀ **Blanket:** depending on the season the group sleeping dorms can get very cold. Bring an extra blanket with you just in case. If you know that you are prone to being cold this is something worth considering.
- ☀ **Trash bag and extra trash bag:** It's a good idea to put dirty clothes back into another bag so they're separate from your clean things which also makes it easier just to dump them in the washer when you get home. A garbage bag is an easy solution to this. You can also bring a second bag with you if you anticipate that you're going to be making extra trash in your room. Your room will have a small trash can by default.
- ☀ **Socks/Slippers:** You have to take your shoes off to go inside the shrine rooms at the monastery, so keep in mind if you'd prefer to be in socks or barefoot and bring options accordingly.
- ☀ **Sleep Mask/Ear Plugs:** Or any sleep accommodations you may need to share a room with someone.
- ☀ **Cushion/Back Pillow:** This can either be the cushion from your car or your own meditation cushion. KTD has cushions but they might be uncomfortable to you or something your body isn't used to. You will be sitting for several hours at a time for four or more sessions a day so you will want to be comfortable.
- ☀ **KN95 or Medical-Grade Mask:** If you are attending a very large teaching or have health issues, you might want to wear a mask. In addition, if you are in any way working on a shrine or sacred objects, it's good to wear a mask for this, as we need to cover our mouths during these activities.

☀ **Khata, Red (or White) Envelopes, Money for Donation:** At every teaching, event, empowerment, etc. there will be an opportunity to get a blessing from the teacher and give them a donation. At some events there might be more than one opportunity to make offerings; if you aren't sure how many there might be, it's good to ask. A Khata is a white (or sometimes blue or yellow) silk scarf that you present to the teacher that they then place over your head to give you a blessing. Red or white envelopes are provided for you to put your money donation in. Both KTC and KTD keep extra khatas and envelopes in case you've forgotten yours but it's good to have your own if possible. For money even just giving \$1 is good. There is no set amount for what you should give, but generally the idea in dharma is to give what you're able to give without regret. To be as generous as you are safely able to be. If you are nervous about this procedure, you can go later in the procession and watch other people but generally the procedure is to put your envelope with the money in your right hand and have the khata draped across both your hands and covering the envelope (out of politeness). When you get to the teacher's seat, place the envelope where you see others are, or on the table if you cannot locate them, then lift the khata to offer to the teacher. They will grab the khata and you can bow and put your hands in prayer as they place it over your head onto your shoulders. After this you can walk away following the person before you.

☀ **Extra Khata:** Sometimes when you walk up with your Khata you are giving the teacher the Khata rather than getting a blessing. Have a spare in this instance. When in doubt watch other people.

☀ **Mala:** There are going to be lots of prayers at KTD even if you don't attend any specific Puja. Having a mala provides you with the opportunity to join in on some of these prayers, recitations, or mandala offerings.

☀ **Instruments:** This is only necessary if you are already doing a puja where you know you need an instrument, as a reminder.

☀ **Travel Altar:** This is not necessary but an option if you want to have it. This could easily just be a small statue you carry with you or a statue and 8 thimbles

or dollhouse bowls you can fill with water. You can also place yours on a cloth to make it even nicer. It can help if you do your personal practice in your room.

Extra Tips for Your Visit to KTD

You can get a lot of information from KTD's website on their meal schedule, puja schedule, rules, and options. But here are some extra suggestions.

- ☀ There are **room sharing** options at KTD to keep cost down, and if you're going with someone you can request to room with them.
- ☀ Wear **Comfy clothes** as you will be sitting for a long time. Pack warm for chillier times of year. Mountain weather can be unpredictable, so pack a hooded jacket or bring an umbrella.
- ☀ **Easy shoes** to take off on and on as you will likely be taking them off frequently to enter the shrine rooms.
- ☀ If you need **Handicap access** make sure to check with KTD staff/front office and they will be happy to help you.
- ☀ **Check with your Lama** prior to going on your trip to see if they have any recommendations and to make sure you make the most of it.
- ☀ You can bring **items you need blessed** to KTD such as practice materials, statues, and malas.
- ☀ If you would like an **interview with a teacher at KTD** talk to the front office (via email at office@kagyu.org, or by phone at 845-679-5906.
- ☀ Make sure to visit the **Namse Bangdzo book store and gift shop** at KTD.
There is a free section on the bottom right near the entrance (labeled as such, ask if you need help) and you can sometimes get lucky with finds. There is another free table by the library also labeled as free. You can also leave dharma books or items here for them to find a new home.
- ☀ Make sure to visit the **Stupas**. KTD has all of the eight traditional Stupa designs and they're surrounded by prayer wheels. Circumambulating this three times is auspicious.

- ☀ **Attend at least one Puja**: There are 3+ Pujas done daily at KTD and even if you only sit and listen or meditate it's a wonderful experience to be able to join.
- ☀ **Explore Nature**: Surrounding KTD are hiking trails and a walk down to the pond nearby. Take this opportunity to enjoy nature and appreciate the Earth.
- ☀ **Visit Woodstock**: There are lots of lovely shops in town and places to eat. We recommend Garden Café, Moon Burger, Tibet Pho, Sunflower Market, Tibet Arts and Crafts, and Catskill Mountain Pizza.
- ☀ **Visit Karme Ling Three-Year Retreat Center**: Located near Delhi, NY, it's an hour northwest of KTD, but (sort of) on the way home for us who live in Ohio. It's well worth a visit if you're able to squeeze it in. They have retreat houses, a Columbarium Shrine to the Five Buddhas, and Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's Memorial Stupa.
- ☀ Try to **attend every teaching**: For whatever event you are going to, you have the option of how little or much you want to attend. Certainly, this is your choice and your only obligation is to yourself so do what's best for you. However, these are amazing and uncommon opportunities. If you have the blessing and the karma to be able to make it all the way to KTD and to be 50 feet away or less from a teaching, you want to take advantage of it. It's hard to say if this opportunity will come again and by being present for it, you're opening yourself up to a wonderful experience and future possibilities. Take advantage of this while you're able.

If any questions are presented regarding this, our team of Travel Advisers will update this guide later to add anything else that is helpful.

May all beings benefit!